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| **Date:** | 13 February 2012 |
| **Subject:** | NBN bridges horticultural gap |

While we don’t automatically associate the rollout of the National Broadband Network (NBN) with horticulture, a project is currently underway to enable students and teachers to bridge the geographic divide of rural and regional Tasmania.

The *Growing our future – Growing the NBN* project will provide increased and innovative access to professional horticultural training for students in regional areas of Tasmania.

The project is a collaborative effort between the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens (RTBG), The GlobalNet Academy (a Hobart-based RTO), the Montagu Street Trade Training Centre run by Circular Head Christian School delivering Horticulture, Geneva Christian College in Latrobe and Hilliard Christian School in Hobart. The pilot is also supported by Independent Schools Tasmania, with an interest in how vocational education and training can be delivered to individual students regardless of location.

It has been made possible through funding from the National VET E-learning Strategy, whose NBN E-learning Programs provide opportunitiesto create innovative approaches to demonstrate the power of broadband to enhance outcomes for learners, and promote growth in broadband-based training as the NBN rollout proceeds.

“This is an exciting project with much potential – before this project, access to this type of training would have been either very limited or not accessible through conventional means”, says NBN E-learning Programs Business Manager Fiona Huskinson.

By piloting the use of the NBN and superfast broadband compatible technologies to deliver nationally accredited training in horticulture and real outdoor learning experiences, the project team will strengthen and enrich partner and learner interactions through a flexible learning environment in which participants – students, teachers and industry representatives – engage with each other across multiple locations in real time and on demand.

Students will be working at the Botanical Gardens and at their respective schools on a program that will include propagating plants and developing horticultural production gardens at each location. The project team will use web cam technology to allow students to monitor the progress of their garden in comparison with the one established at the RTBG and those at schools in other locations. Live streaming video using notebooks and tablets in the outdoors will be one of the initiatives to enable the schools' teaching staff and students to have unique real time access to the RTBG professional horticulture teaching staff. The project team hopes to have participants establish their own production gardens and gain professional and nationally recognised skills at the same time.

With the NBN enabling a real-time and on-demand interactive horticultural experience, it is hoped that this learning environment will promote an interest in horticulture as a first choice career and an appreciation of the role it plays in food security. It is also hoped that by involving the Royal Botanical Gardens as the professional horticulturalists in the project, students and schools from around Tasmania will develop stronger long term links with the Gardens and an interest in its long-term sustainability.

With a rich diversity of experience and expertise, the project team is focused on the delivery of innovative training programs using broadband-based information technology to improve training access and outcomes for learners.

The National VET E-learning Strategy is the responsibility of the Flexible Learning Advisory Group (FLAG), a key policy advisory group on national directions and priorities for information and communication technologies in the VET sector.

“Through this Strategy, we are supporting the development of e-learning programs that maximise the opportunities associated with the rollout of the NBN,” says FLAG Chair Raymond Garrand, Chief Executive of the South Australian Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology.

“We are excited at the high quality of these projects, which demonstrate the strong interest in increasing participation in training and improving skill levels in the workforce.”

**Note: The Botanical Gardens is available as a venue for photo opportunities or interviews.**

**Core statements for editorial use**

* The National VET E-learning Strategy 2012-2015 (‘the Strategy’) is aimed at strengthening the Australian training sector’s use of new learning technologies, stimulating innovative approaches to increasing participation in training and employment, and improving the skill levels of the Australian workforce
* Investment in the Strategy will stimulate innovative approaches to increasing participation in training and improve the skill levels of the Australian workforce
* To enable the three-year program of action, government funding has been approved to:
* capitalise on the rollout of the National Broadband Network by demonstrating the benefits of the national investment in broadband
* support large-scale workforce development in industry through partnerships and comprehensive e-learning advice
* expand participation and access for individuals through e-learning programs delivering foundation skills and e-literacy
* The Strategy is managed by the Flexible Learning Advisory Group (FLAG), a key policy advisory group on national directions and priorities for information and communication technologies in the VET sector
* The chair of FLAG is Mr Raymond Garrand, Chief Executive of the South Australian Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology.

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